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News Release

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The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council will hold public meetings from April 14-18, 1997 at the Tybee Island Town Hall, 403 Butler Avenue, Tybee Island, Georgia; telephone: (912) 786-4573.

Council to take Snapper Grouper Conservation Measures to Public Hearing

At the April meeting, the South Atlantic Council will review the pre-public hearing draft of Amendment 9 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan before approving it for public hearing.

Amendment 9 proposes 12 conservation measures for several species in the snapper grouper management unit.

- *Increase red porgy minimum size limit to 13" TL for recreational and commercial fishermen; establish a recreational bag limit of 5;

- *Increase the black sea bass minimum size to 10" TL for recreational and commercial fishermen; establish a bag limit of 20;

- *Require escape vents and escape panels with degradable fasteners in black sea bass pots;

- *Measures for the conservation of greater amberjack;

- *Vermillion snapper size increase to 12" TL;

- *Gag minimum size increase to 24" TL; prohibit harvest Jan.-March;

- *Black grouper minimum size increase to 24" TL;

- *Specify that within the 5-fish aggregate grouper bag limit, no more than 2 may be gag and no more than 2 may be black grouper;

- *Establish an aggregate recreational bag limit of 20 fish, inclusive of all snapper grouper species not currently under a bag limit;

- *Establish a South Atlantic EEZ transit zone for vessels with Gulf fish trap permits;

- *Specify that vessels with bottom longline gear aboard may only possess snowy, warsaw, yellowedge and misty groupers, golden, blueline and sand tilefish;

- *A seasonal closure of the fishery. Currently, there is no proposed action, although there are 5 options being considered for a seasonal closure.

Public hearings will be held in May and June. Written comments may be submitted to the council office.

Council to Set Mackerel Quotas

The council's SSC will review the 1997/1998 annual mackerel stock assessment and make recommendations to the council for setting this year's total allowable catch (TAC) at the April meeting.

The mackerel stock assessment took place March 31- April 4 in Miami, Florida. This stock assessment included a review of new information relative to catch per unit effort and natural mortality rates.

The Stock Assessment Panel uses current available data to set an allowable biological catch (ABC) range, and the council sets the annual TAC within that range. This ensures the resource is protected while the council considers the social and economic impacts on fishermen of setting TAC.

Last year, the ABC for Atlantic king mackerel was between 4.1 and 6.8 million pounds, and the council set TAC at 6.8, the highest end of the range. TAC for the Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel was also set at the highest end of its ABC range, at 7 million pounds.

Latest data show landings at the end of the 1996/1997 fishing year for Atlantic king mackerel catch to be 81% of the quota, and Atlantic Spanish mackerel catches to be 71% of the quota.

The council will take public comment before setting mackerel quotas on April 17 at 1:45 p.m. in Tybee Island, GA.

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Council's April Meeting Agenda

Monday April 14

1:30 p.m.- 6:00 p.m. Scientific and Statistical

Committee: The SSC will meet to receive a report on the Mackerel Stock Assessment, discuss the Assessment and formulate recommendations to the Council, review Snapper Grouper Amendment 9 options, review the Bluefish Assessment and proposed actions, and revisit the Amberjack Assessment.

6:30 p.m.

ACCSP Scoping: As a partner in the ACCSP, the Council will hold a scoping meeting to solicit public input on ways to improve commercial and recreational fisheries data collection.

Tuesday, April 15

8:30 a.m.-12:00 noon

Joint Mackerel Advisory Panel and Mackerel

Committee: The advisory panel will develop recommendations for setting total allowable catch and bag limits and other framework items as necessary.

1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Mackerel Committee: The Committee will meet to hear the status of last year's framework action, Amendment 8 and current landings, develop recommendations on formulating total allowable catches and bag limits, develop recommendations on other framework items as necessary, discuss mackerel Amendment 9, and receive an update on mackerel tournament data.

3:30 p.m.- 5:30 p.m.

Highly Migratory Species Committee: The Committee will meet to review and comment on Amendment 1 to the Shark Fishery Management Plan, which deals with implementing limited access for the shark fishery, and Amendment 1 to the Swordfish FMP, and to hear the status of NMFS highly migratory species advisory panels.

Wednesday, April 16

8:30 a.m.- 10:30 a.m.

SOPPs Committee: The Committee will meet to discuss the Magnuson-Stevens Act mandates requiring changes to the council's Statement of Organizational Practices and Procedures, and will approve necessary changes.

10:30 a.m.-12:00 noon

Bluefish Committee: The Committee will review the

Bluefish Assessment, Review Amendment 1 to the Bluefish FMP, and approve Amendment 1 for public hearing.

1:30 p.m.- 5:30 p.m.

Snapper Grouper Committee: The Committee will review new material in the Snapper Grouper Amendment document, review the SSC position on the Greater Amberjack Assessment, and approve Amendment 9 for public hearing.

Thursday, April 17

8:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m.

Habitat and Environmental Protection Committee: The Committee will review previous Habitat Advisory Panel recommendations and develop council options for addressing essential fisheries habitat.

10:30 a.m.-12:00 noon

Advisory Panel Selection Committee (closed session): The Committee will develop recommendations for advisory panel member appointments.

1:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m.

Council Session: The full Council will meet at 1:45 p.m. to hear the Mackerel Committee Report, take public comment on mackerel TACs, bag limits and other framework actions, set mackerel TACs and bag limits, and take action on other framework items as necessary; at 3:00 p.m. to hear the Highly Migratory Committee Species report and formulate Council comments on Shark Amendment 1 and Swordfish Amendment 1; at 3:30 p.m. to hear the SOPPs Committee report and approve changes in the council SOPPs for submission to the Secretary of Commerce; at 4:00 p.m. to hear the Habitat Committee report and develop council options for addressing essential fisheries habitat; at 4:30 p.m. to hear the Snapper Grouper Committee report and approve Snapper Grouper Amendment 9 for public hearing.

Friday April 18

8:30 a.m.-12:00 noon

Council Session: The full Council will meet at 8:30 a.m. to hear the Advisory Panel Selection Committee report in closed session and appoint advisory panel members; at 9:00 a.m. to hear the Bluefish Committee report and approve Bluefish Amendment 1 for public hearing; at 9:30 a.m. to hear the Executive Committee report, approve an implementation schedule for Sustainable Fisheries Act provisions; hear a request from the Department of the Navy; and Approve guidelines for holding informal meetings with fishermen. From 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon, the Council will hear a status report of the ACCSP, agency and liaison reports, and discuss other business.

Atlantic State and Federal Cooperative Seeking Public Input for Development of Standardized Fisheries Data Collection

As a partner in the Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), the South Atlantic Council is holding a scoping meeting on Monday, April 14 at 6:30 p.m. in Tybee Island, Georgia to solicit ideas from the public on ways to improve commercial and recreational fisheries data collection.

For years, biologists, fishery managers, and user groups have recognized that available fisheries data do not provide the quality of information we need to best achieve our common goals of protecting, restoring, and conserving marine resources.

For example, management of bluefish, a migratory species ranging from Maine to Florida, has been seriously hampered by a lack of adequate length and age data. Such problems contribute to a high degree of uncertainty and distrust in stock assessments, upon which management decisions are based. Frustration over this and similar problems has prompted federal, regional, and state fisheries agencies along the Atlantic coast to join forces with fishermen to improve the situation.

The ACCSP, a cooperative state-federal marine and coastal fisheries data collection program, is bringing fishermen and managers together to design a system that is workable, consistent, and effective all along the Atlantic coast.

The ACCSP is currently investigating the successes, problems and redundancies of existing fisheries data collection programs. Input is being sought from all interested user groups to ensure that the ACCSP meets the needs of a coastwide data collection and management system. Ideas given at public meetings or in writing will ensure that future data collection processes will incorporate the everyday, real-world concerns of fishermen and managers.

Now is your chance to get involved in the design of the program. This scoping meeting provides you the opportunity to give recommendations pertaining to fisheries data collection in the development of this program.

For more information, call Susan Buchanan at 803-571-4366.



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